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HIGHLIGHTS

...An ERIC/CAPS Fact Sheet

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Comprehensive Guidance Program Design

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Overview

Guidance in the past has been a set of loosely related services whose focus has shifted with cultural trends. In the last two decades, the concept of guidance for development has emerged based on the idea of describing human development in terms of occupational, educational, and personal/social needs. Schools have attempted to provide "comprehensive" services by the simple addition of new programs and activities in response to the identification of new student needs. The result has been a number of problems:

- lack of coordination of activities
- duplication of efforts by several staff members
- confusion about counselors' roles
- unexamined assumptions about the relationship between staff activities and student outcomes
- focus of attention on a few student subgroups (e.g., seniors, the college bound, deviants)
- unrealistic expectations for the outcomes of guidance activities
- difficulty in identifying and evaluating the actual outcomes of guidance

In addition to these internal difficulties, the socio-economic situation has changed, and support for the development of new services has diminished. Guidance administrators are now faced with:

- an increasing demand for accountability
- a decreasing level of financial support
- growing public dissatisfaction with education outcomes (both cognitive and affective)
- public pressure to use available funds for back-to-basics

Rationale for a New Direction

Research has shown that psychological maturity is a better predictor of subsequent life/career satisfaction than are school grades and academic content mastery. The schools' response to the back-to-basics demand should therefore not neglect students' affective development. Moreover, if education is seen as the transmission of a culture's survival skills, instruction in the basics is not enough. Students also need the communication and socialization skills involved in successful career development. A career is now considered to be more than just an occupation; it has both a longitudinal dimension with sequential roles such as student, worker, and retiree, and a cross-sectional dimension consisting of the interactive relationships between job, family, and community roles. Students now face a wide range of choices in occupations, career patterns, and life styles. To deal with these choices wisely they need:

- extensive practice in problem-solving and decision-making
- access to occupational information and skill in processing information efficiently
- an understanding of personal interests, values, and abilities and the importance of each to life/career satisfaction
- knowledge of social and economic trends and their effect on individual life/career development

Guidelines for a New Comprehensive Program

Leaders in the guidance field have recently advocated a comprehensive program that would meet the complex guidance needs of today's students and, at the same time, resolve many of the problems experienced by guidance in the past. If fully implemented, the proposed program could very well decrease costs and increase effectiveness. Instead of a set of loosely related services, the new program would:

- consist of interrelated and interdependent services organized around a conceptual model
- be an integral part of the total educational system
- address the life career development needs of all students, K-12
- be student-outcome oriented rather than counselor-activity oriented
- contain a self-monitoring system to provide for systematic program improvement

Specific guidelines are as follows:

1. *Build on the existing program.* Evolution is usually more acceptable and less costly than revolution.
2. *Use a teamwork approach.* Involvement helps people feel a sense of ownership and makes implementation of new directions more acceptable. More important, however, is the fact that there exists a wealth of knowledge, wisdom, skill, and creativity in teachers, parents, students, administrators, and members of the community. Tapping these resources by asking members of the various groups to serve on advisory councils, planning committees, and special task forces can significantly enhance both the quantity and quality of guidance services.
3. *Identify the desired student outcomes.* List a large number of potentially desirable student outcomes and ask parents, teachers, administrators, students, and other relevant community representatives to rate the importance of each outcome. Using the results of this survey (and a guidance team composed of representatives from the various groups identified), select a set of high-priority student outcomes that the school can realistically address with existing resources. As soon as

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possible, report the survey results, the selected top-priority items, the rationale for selection, and plans for the next step to all participants and ask for their comments and suggestions. This feedback not only assures people that their input has been used, but also clarifies for everyone the specific goals of the guidance program.

4. *Plan program activities which are directly linked to the desired student outcomes.* For each student outcome, diagram a conceptual model of the stages through which each student must progress in order to achieve the desired outcome stage. Then, for each stage, link (diagrammatically):
   (a) the activities that would directly help the student reach that stage; and
   (b) examples of observable evidence that would demonstrate the student's mastery of relevant skills and knowledge.

   An examination of the entire set of conceptual models in terms of the logic of the linkages (activity → evidence → achievement) and the potential areas of overlap can eliminate unnecessary and irrelevant activities. This in turn increases the cost effectiveness of the program. Also, by having clear criteria for student readiness to progress to the next stage of each desired outcome, the guidance program can be truly responsive to individual developmental needs.
5. *Develop an on-going evaluation system.* No program is perfect when it is first implemented. Nor do students' needs remain the same over time. A self-monitoring evaluation system can provide information necessary to:
   (a) prove program effectiveness thereby meeting external demands for accountability; and
   (b) improve program effectiveness thereby maintaining a guidance program that is dynamically responsive to the changing needs of students and society.

The Counselor's Role

In the past, undefined and/or unrealistic expectations of the guidance program have made school counselors particularly vulnerable to criticism and assignment to inappropriate (usually clerical) tasks. Guidance has often been viewed as an ancillary (and dispensable) service. Unfortunately, counselor training institutions have perpetuated this problem by emphasizing counselors' roles as therapists and minimizing their roles as educators. The new comprehensive guidance program would put school counselors back in the mainstream of education and would require a more professional and cost-effective use of their skills.

While one-to-one counseling is still recognized as quite valuable in some cases, it is no longer seen as a cost-effective or viable means for delivering comprehensive school guidance services. The new program requires counselors to "stretch" their skills by:

- engaging in more group counseling and guidance activities
- formalizing and coordinating teachers' and parents' roles in guidance
- sharing expertise with teachers and parents through individual and group consultation
- learning how to extend measurement concepts from the individual to the program level (thus acquiring the expertise to develop and manage a self-monitoring program evaluation system)
- providing change-agent leadership for on-going program improvement

Resource Documents

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ABSTRACT

This fact sheet presents an overview of problems in designing comprehensive guidance programs and a rationale for a new direction. Five guidelines for a new comprehensive program are discussed: (1) build on existing program; (2) use teamwork approach; (3) identify desired student outcomes; (4) plan program activities related to outcomes; and (5) develop an ongoing evaluation system. The counselor's role in the new design is defined. (NB)

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